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ABSTRACT

The Australian Language Levels (ALL) curriculum is being developed as a learner-centered, activities-based approach to second language instruction at all levels. It is activities-based in that learners use the target language in specific activities for specific purposes. Each activity integrates content with process or method, and activities are planned to relate directly to program goals and objectives. A table of language use has been developed to help teachers categorize language use through activity types for syllabus planning. Five broad goals of language learning are targeted: communication, sociocultural understanding, helping students learn how to learn, language and cultural awareness, and general knowledge. Each of these broad goals is translated into a series of specific goals. Syllabuses and curriculum materials based on the ALL model are being developed in Australia in a range of languages. Each syllabus is comprised of modules containing specific goals, general objectives, and suggested activities. The modules are organized either around a theme or topic, or around a skill, genre, text, or specific project. Each syllabus also contains a checklist of content to guide teachers in planning units. A series of questions is provided to stimulate teacher awareness of what communicative teaching is. (MSE)

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AN ACTIVITIES-BASED LANGUAGES CURRICULUM: THE ALL MODEL

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Preamble

The *Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines* , developed to establish a national approach to the teaching of all languages other than English (LOTE) and ESL, were published by the CDC last July. The *ALL Guidelines* are intended for use by language teachers in primary and secondary schools, by syllabus writers, curriculum developers and consultants concerned with the languages curriculum in primary and secondary schools, by teacher educators and teacher inservice educators, by preservice students, and by assessment authority personnel. (The *ALL Guidelines* are available from the Publications Unit of the CDC.)

National and state/territory initiatives in language-specific curriculum development based on the *ALL Guidelines* are already underway across Australia in the following languages: Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Spanish, Thai, and Vietnamese. The links between ESL and ALL are currently being explored in detail.

Introduction

The study of a second language is of direct relevance to the generally agreed central aims of education: literacy and numeracy, communication skills, skills for social living, and problem solving skills.

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A growing number of voices today are advocating the right of all Australian learners to be provided with the opportunity to learn a second language, as well as the right of all learners from a non-English-speaking- background to be provided with the opportunity to develop skills in English which will allow them to become successful members of our multicultural, multilingual society (documented in Lo Bianco, 1987).

But what is meant by 'learn a second language'? Most people these days would agree that languages should be taught and learned 'for communication'. While most language teachers nowadays will readily subscribe to the basic tenets of 'communicative teaching', as it has become known, there has existed a widespread difference of opinion about how the approach is best applied in the day to day circumstances of the classroom.

One of the tasks of the ALL Project during its three and a half years' existence to date has been to develop a definition of communicative teaching relevant to the Australian context. The Project advocates a principled, learner-centred, activities-based approach that pursues well described goals and is relevant to the teaching and learning of all languages, at all phases of schooling. Given the level of public acceptance of the philosophy and underlying principles of the Project's recently published *Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines* by specialists in languages other than English and administrators from all public education systems in Australia, it is probably fair to claim that communicative teaching à la ALL is an approach that is in fact regarded as relevant in the overall Australian context. The nexus that exists between ESL and ALL is also currently being examined and is attracting strong interest from around the country.

The activity

The *ALL Guidelines* advocate an activities-based curriculum for all phases of schooling. An activity is defined as follows:

> An activity involves the purposeful and active use of language where learners are required to call upon their language resource to meet the needs of a given communicative situation (*ALL Guidelines, Book 2*, 1988, page 19).

This definition implies that in an activity learners will be using the target language to achieve a purpose. It also implies that learners will not be totally aware of what language they will use next, nor what meanings they will exchange next. To achieve the purpose, learners are required to deal with the processes, skills, and strategies associated with language use, as well as ensure that the language generated is socioculturally appropriate.

The focus in an activity, then, is on the purposeful and active use of language rather than on the display or practice of language forms and exponents (often the case in many approaches that language teachers have tried). This focus is implicit in two of the eight teaching/learning principles which the Project has developed, namely, that learners learn a language best when

> they are provided with opportunities to participate in communicative use of the target language in a wide range of activities (Principle 2), and when
>
> they are exposed to communicative data which is comprehensible and relevant to their own needs and interests (Principle 3).

These two principles embody the fundamental belief that language learning is most likely to occur when learners are

- provided with plenty of opportunities to participate in purposeful language use (the purpose being other than that of learning the language per se)
- provided with a wide range of such activities
- exposed to language which they are able to comprehend (with the help of gestures, body language, and other contextual support)
- exposed to language which is relevant to their needs and interests.

This is not to suggest that grammar and other elements of language have no place in an activities-based curriculum. A judicious focus on vocabulary, structures, etc. is a valuable and essential part of the activities-based learning process. Learners are introduced to and gain increasing control over these atomistic elements of language, as well as over individual skills and strategies, by means of exercises:

> An exercise focuses on one or more elements of the communication process in order to promote learning of the items of language, knowledge, skills, and strategies needed in communication activities.

The importance of exercises is recognised in Principle 4:

> Learners learn a language best when they focus deliberately on various language forms, skills, and strategies, in order to support the process of language acquisition.

As the need arises teachers develop exercises in order to feed the learning process and assist learners to participate effectively in activities. This means that exercises are not undertaken as an end in themselves; they are best undertaken when the language, knowledge, skills, and/or strategies on which learners are focusing, can be related to a context. It is the the activity which provides this context. Thus, exercises which occur immediately before a related activity, during the course of a related activity, or immediately after a related activity, are considered to be the most valid. They are also likely to be the most effective.

Rationale for an activities-based approach

Many language syllabuses in use today are organised thematically around functions and/or notions and/or situations. Another common organisational framework in common use is based on the four macroskills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Other syllabuses are organised around grammar, translation, and literature. Others again are based on combinations of the above.

In an ALL syllabus and/or program of work it is the *activity* which is the central unit of analysis. In an ALL curriculum learners learn by *doing*. They learn to communicate by using the target language. Learning is enhanced by interaction, and learners are encouraged to work together in activities, in pairs or in groups, expressing their own personalities, their own ideas, and their own views and meanings.

In addition, the activity is seen as an *integrative* unit of analysis. It combines the content of the teaching/learning as well as the process or method. Inherent within an activity are not only language data but also a range of skills and strategies which learners will need in order to mobilise the data. It is because the skills and strategies imply certain methodological procedures, that content and process become integrated.

A range of activities

An essential feature of an activities-based curriculum is that it contains a *range* of learning experiences. It is essential that learners experience a variety of language use for a variety of purposes. Learners also need to develop a range of skills and strategies in order to be able to operate effectively in different communicative contexts.

Apart from the enriching experience which a planned range of activities can provide learners, a variety of activities can also assist teachers to cater for both the subjective and the objective needs of individual learners with their different interests, motivation, learning paces, learning styles, and levels of confidence, as well as their different levels of language proficiency, knowledge, and cultural awareness. Activities can help teachers provide greater flexibility for learners and so respond to the most fundamental of the ALL Project's principles of language teaching/learning, namely that learners learn a language best when

> they are treated as individuals with their own needs and interests (Principle 1).

In her book, *Developing Communication Skills* (1987) Pat Pattison suggests that variety is as important for the well-being of the teacher as it is for the well-being of learners:

> 'Using a variety of activities has its rewards for the teacher also. I cannot be the only teacher who has been as bored as her learners with predictable drills and dialogues. The lessons I have most enjoyed have been those in which learners have both entertained and impressed me by their inventiveness and resourcefulness, revealing unexpected talents in role-play, story telling, puzzle solving, etc. which I could not equal despite my greater knowledge of the [target] language'.

The need for planning

No matter how purposeful or engaging activities may be, however, it is not enough simply to provide learners with strings of unrelated activities. Since teaching involves helping learners to build bridges or establish links, it is important that they understand the connection between different learning experiences. Activities, therefore, need to be *integrated* in a meaningful way. They also need to be *planned* so that they relate directly to the goals and objectives of the program.

The *Table of Language Use* has been developed to help teachers provide learners with a judicious spread of language learning experiences. Although it is an arbitrary construct (and it cannot be otherwise, given the nature of language and language learning), the table presents a categorisation of language use through *activity-types* which allows teachers to plan and/or analyse the kinds of language use which are occurring in their classroom. Thus the table represents a tool for planning as well as evaluation.

[Table of Language Use]

When using the table to plan an activities-based syllabus or unit of work it is important to ensure also that the variety of activities provided is an informed variety. The range of activities needs to encompass a variety of purposes and a variety of skills and strategies, as well as a variety of language use. Such a variety is designed to provide learners with the kinds of learning experiences which will assist them to achieve the range of goals of language learning.

The *ALL Guidelines* identify five broad goals of language learning:

- communication
- sociocultural
- learning-how-to-learn
- language and cultural awareness, and
- general knowledge.

Each broad goal is elaborated further into a series of specific goals.

[The integration of goals]

The specific communication goals are fundamental to the ALL Project's concept of language learning. All other goals are seen as being integrated with the communication goals, and may be achieved through the same activities which are designed to help learners achieve the communication goals. The specific goals are fundamental in planning learning activities.

[Table of goals]

Syllabuses and other curriculum materials based on the ALL model are already being developed in different parts of Australia in a range languages. An ALL syllabus is comprised of several 'modules'. Individual modules each contain specific goals, general objectives, and suggested activities. The goals, objectives, and activities in each module are integrated by means of an *organisational focus*. This might be a theme or topic, or it might also be a skill, genre, text, project, etc.

An ALL syllabus will also provide checklists of specific content (grammar, functions, notions, a lexicon, etc.) to guide teachers in their planning of units of work.

[Syllabus module]

Syllabuses which are integrated and planned in this way will provide teachers with greater guidance and will facilitate their task of interpreting and using the syllabus to develop a quality program of work.

Finally, a few questions are provided to encourage teachers who believe that they do teach communicatively to ponder their processes.

THE ACTIVITIES-BASED APPROACH: QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. To what extent do your learners engage in activities (defined as 'the purposeful and active use of language')?

2. What kinds of activities do you provide for your learners?

3. What emphasis do you place on activities as opposed to exercises?

4. Do your activities involve a range of language use, and a range of skills and strategies?

5. Do your activities relate directly to the goals (or aims) and objectives of your program?

6. Are your activities integrated in some way?

7. Do your activities allow for learner differences?

8. Do your activities allow learners to work independently sometimes?

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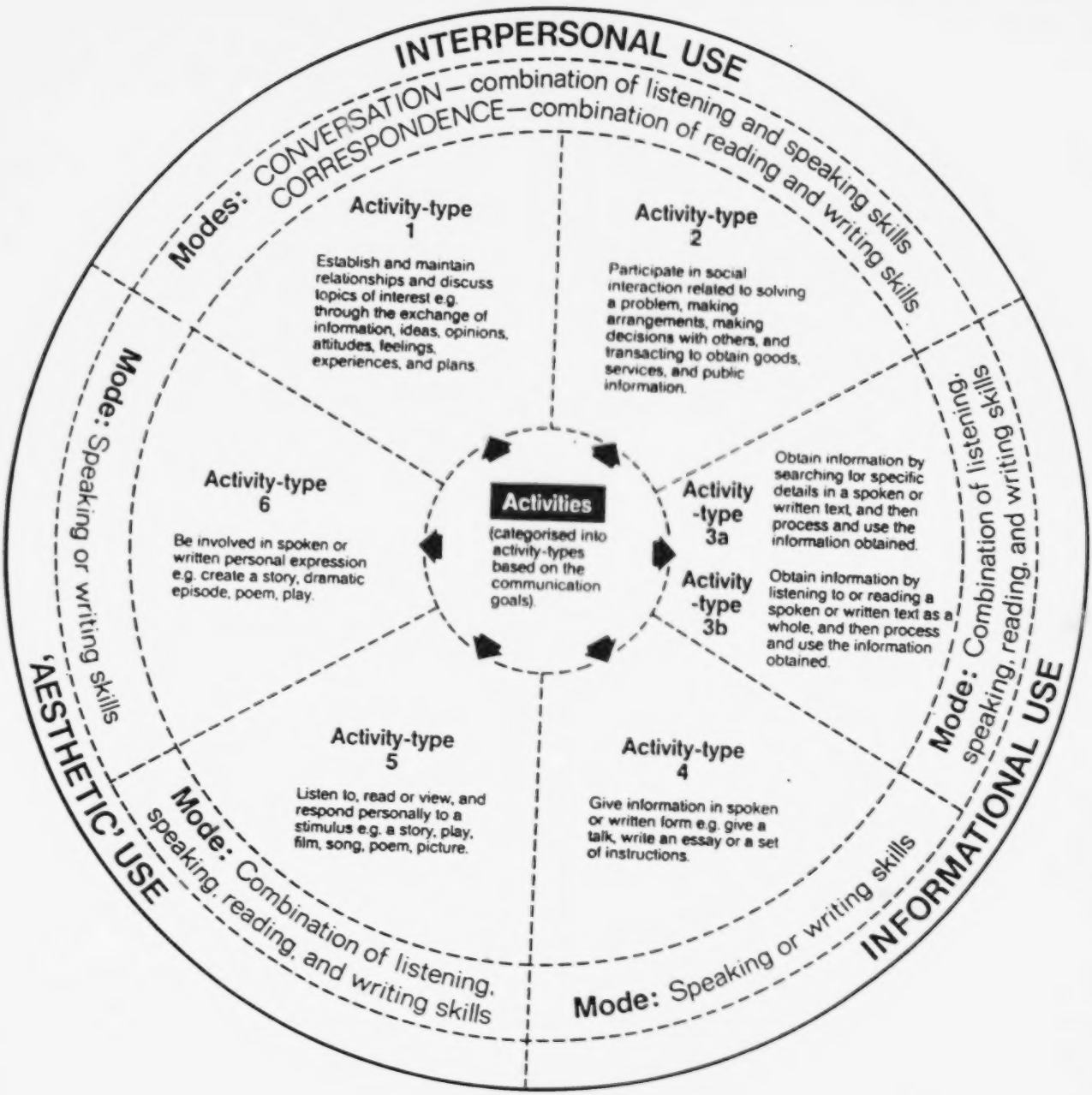
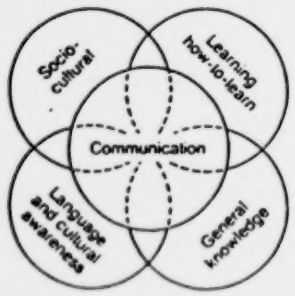

INTERPERSONAL USE
Modes: CONVERSATION—combination of listening and speaking skills
CORRESPONDENCE—combination of reading and writing skills
Activity-type 1
Establish and maintain relationships and discuss topics of interest e.g. through the exchange of information, ideas, opinions, attitudes, feelings, experiences, and plans.
Activity-type 2
Participate in social interaction related to solving a problem, making arrangements, making decisions with others, and transacting to obtain goods, services, and public information.
Activities
(categorised into activity-types based on the communication goals).
Activity -type 3a
Obtain information by searching for specific details in a spoken or written text, and then process and use the information obtained.
Activity -type 3b
Obtain information by listening to or reading a spoken or written text as a whole, and then process and use the information obtained.
Mode: Combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills
INFORMATIONAL USE
Activity-type 4
Give information in spoken or written form e.g. give a talk, write an essay or a set of instructions.
Mode: Speaking or writing skills
Activity-type 5
Listen to, read or view, and respond personally to a stimulus e.g. a story, play, film, song, poem, picture.
Mode: Combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills
Activity-type 6
Be involved in spoken or written personal expression e.g. create a story, dramatic episode, poem, play.
Mode: Speaking or writing skills
'AESTHETIC' USE

TABLE OF GOALS



COMMUNICATION GOALS

Broad goal statement

By participating in activities organised around use of the target language, learners will acquire communication skills in the target language, in order that they may widen their networks of interpersonal relations, have direct access to information in the target language, and use their language skills for study, vocational, and leisure-based purposes.

Specific goals

Learners will aim to be able to use the target language to:

- establish and maintain relationships and discuss topics of interest e.g. through the exchange of information, ideas, opinions, attitudes, feelings, experiences, and plans
- participate in social interaction related to solving a problem, making arrangements, making decisions with others, and transacting to obtain goods, services, and public information
- obtain information by searching for specific details in a spoken or written text, and then process and use the information obtained
- obtain information by listening to or reading a spoken or written text as a whole, and then process and use the information obtained
- give information in spoken or written form e.g. give a talk, write an essay or a set of instructions
- listen to, read or view, and respond personally to a stimulus e.g. a story, play, film, song, poem, picture
- be involved in spoken or written personal expression e.g. create a story, dramatic episode, poem, play

SOCIOCULTURAL GOALS

Broad goal statement:

Learners will develop an understanding of the culture of the target language community, which they can use as a basis for informed comparison with other cultures. Through this process learners will develop an appreciation of the validity of different ways of perceiving and encoding experience and of organising interpersonal relations, and reach a more secure acceptance of their own personal identity and value.

Specific goals

Through the sociocultural goals learners should gain the following insights about the target language community:

- an understanding of how interpersonal relations are conducted
- an understanding of the everyday life patterns of their contemporary age-group (including life at home, at school, and at leisure)
- some insight into its cultural traditions
- some knowledge of its historical roots and its relationship to other communities
- some knowledge of its economy and the world of work
- an understanding of its political and social institutions
- an understanding of its cultural achievements
- some knowlege of its current affairs

It is hoped that these goals will enable learners to understand more about the target language culture, to develop positive attitudes towards it, and take advantage of opportunities offered for personal involvement.

LEARNING-HOW-TO-LEARN GOALS

Broad goal statement:

Learners will be able to take a growing responsibility for the management of their own learning, so that they learn how to learn, and how to learn a language.

Specific goals

Learners should develop:

- cognitive processing skills (to enable them to understand and express values, attitudes, and feelings; to process information, and to think and respond creatively)
- learning-how-to-learn skills (to enable them to take responsibility for their own learning)
- communication strategies (to enable them to sustain communication in the target language)

Learning-how-to-learn goals can be elaborated into skills and strategies. Lists of suggested cognitive processing skills, learning-how-to-learn skills, and communication strategies are provided in Appendix 1, Section ____.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS GOALS

Broad goal statement:

Learners will reflect upon and develop an awareness of the role and nature of language and of culture in everyday life, so that they may understand the diversity of the world around them, and act upon it in judicious ways.

Specific goals

Through the language and cultural awareness goals, learners will develop an understanding of:

- the aesthetic features in their own language and in the language of others
- the functions of language in everyday life (e.g. the various ways that language is used to achieve what the speaker wants; the way that language is used to show levels of politeness, anger, etc.)
- the systematic nature of language and it works (e.g. that patterns exist in language; that language parts can be analysed and named, etc.)
- the way that language adapts to context (e.g. individual speakers will adapt their language according to who they are with - be it with friends or an important person, in a group, or with a speaker of another language, or where they are - be it at a formal meeting, at school, etc.)
- the concepts of accent, dialect, register, and other forms of language variation
- how language grows, borrows, changes, falls into disuse, and dies
- how language is learnt (both as a first and as a second language)
- how language is a manifestation of culture
- cultural variation and the enriching nature of diversity
- the importance of language maintenance to members of a language's speech community

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE GOALS

Broad goal statement:

Learners will gain knowledge and understanding of a range of subject matter related to their needs, interests, and aspirations, as well as to other areas of their formal learning.

Specific goals

General knowledge goals apply to all language programs to varying degrees. A bilingual or an ESL program, for example, might use the target language as a vehicle by which to learn other subject matter e.g. science, social studies, etc.